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THE SINO-VIETNAMESE DISPUTE OVER TERRITORIAL CLAIMS, 1974–1978: VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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Relying on Vietnamese internal government documents now available to scholars for consultation in the No. 3 Vietnam National Archive in Hanoi, this article examines the linkage between the escalated Sino-Vietnamese territorial dispute and the increased Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese residents and experts in northern Vietnam from 1974 to 1978 owing to state-sponsored Vietnamese anti-China/irredentist nationalism. During this period, Vietnamese leaders were seeking to forge national unity, solidify popular loyalty to the state, and mobilize domestic resources to defend the Vietnamese "fatherland" against the threat of Chinese territorial expansion. Specifically, this article demonstrates how these policies encouraged mistreatment of Chinese residents and experts, and created a climate of fear and paranoia within the Chinese community which caused the widespread flight of Chinese from northern Vietnam in 1977–1978.

Keywords: Sino-Vietnamese relations; border disputes; nationalism; overseas Chinese

This article offers new insights into a still poorly understood issue – namely the dynamics shaping the Sino-Vietnamese territorial disputes and the mass exodus of ethnic Chinese from northern Vietnam between 1974 and 1978. Relying on previously unavailable Vietnamese internal government documents in conjunction with existing scholarly works based on Chinese sources, this study challenges dominant narratives, which attribute the exodus to the collapse of Sino-Vietnamese relations, by providing a far more detailed and comprehensive account.[1] I argue that two variant forms of Vietnamese nationalism – one emphasizing "forced assimilation" as a demonstration of loyalty, and the other the need to protect the "fatherland" (*tổ quốc*) from further territorial losses to Chinese expansionism – reinforced one another and catalyzed the flight of Chinese residents and technical experts in 1977–1978. Specifically, during the period 1974–1978, the two variant forms of state-sponsored nationalism enacted in sequence against the perceived threat of

1 For earlier accounts, see Han 2009; Chang 1986, 1982a and 1982b. Also see Duiker 1986, and the chapter "The Collapse of Vietnamese–Chinese Relations," in Morris 1999, pp. 167–96. Ross (1988, p. 186) went so far as to attribute the Sino-Vietnamese conflict over Chinese residents in Vietnam to Chinese concern about Soviet instigation, beyond mere bilateral concerns.

Chinese territorial expansion created a climate of fear in Vietnam which exacerbated the mistreatment of these Chinese residents and experts, which in turn provoked increasingly bellicose responses from China. Pro-Soviet Vietnamese rhetoric and chauvinistic actions in Cambodia and Laos in the context of growing competition between Hanoi and Beijing over Indochina after 1968 prompted Chinese concerns regarding Vietnamese expansionism there as well.[2] Over time, this created a negative feedback loop where "tit-for-tat" land grabbing at the local level quickly undermined any possibility of a negotiated agreement on the disputed territory and rapidly escalated the Sino-Vietnamese border conflict, with spiraling negative effects on other issues. This gave Beijing cause to cut off all Chinese aid to Vietnam in early 1978. The result was the brief but extremely bloody border conflict in February 1979. China's incursion was a massive military operation, its largest since the PLA intervention in the Korean War, involving at least 450,000 troops; the 80,000 troops that China actually committed were met by some 75,000–100,000 Vietnamese militia and troops, of which 50,000 were regular combat forces.[3] Casualties were high, and roughly comparable on both sides: an estimated 25,000–28,000 Chinese dead and 37,000 wounded and 20,000 Vietnamese dead and 35,000–45,000 wounded.[4]

In Hanoi's view, Beijing's opportunistic use of force in January 1974 to consolidate its control over the Paracel islands was clear evidence of territorial expansionism, and this provided a rationale for Vietnamese leaders to articulate anti-China nationalism. The Sino-Vietnamese tit-for-tat struggle in the ensuing years produced negative spillover effects in three related areas. First, as Chinese territorial expansion continued along its southern boundaries, Hanoi became increasingly concerned about the loyalty of Chinese residents in Vietnam toward China, especially those living in the northern part of the country. As a result, Hanoi intensified its policy of nationalizing Chinese residents through forced assimilation and demands for public expressions of loyalty to the Vietnamese state, and through the dissemination of anti-China propaganda. Such policies encouraged mistreatment of Chinese residents by local Vietnamese authorities, and further inflamed China's animosity toward Vietnam, particularly among top Chinese leaders including Deng Xiaoping, who was keen on taking punitive action against Vietnam. Second, as Beijing expressed grave concern for the plight of ethnic Chinese residents in Vietnam, this raised expectations among the minority Chinese community in Vietnam that it would be either incorporated into greater China or be physically protected by the Chinese government. Having developed such expectations, Chinese residents resisted direct attempts by the Vietnamese government to integrate them more firmly under the state's control through forced assimilation policies. Finally, the mass exodus of Chinese residents from Vietnam,

2 For more details about Sino-Vietnamese rivalry over Indochina, especially Beijing's attitude towards Hanoi's handling of the Khmer Communist Party, see Goscha 2006, pp. 154–59 and Nguyen 2006, pp. 15–18; and also Zhai 2000, pp. 180–81 and 184–90.

3 O'Dowd 2007, pp. 45, 47, and Womack 2006, p. 200. For more details on the PLA military operations, see Zhang 2005, pp. 865–867.

4 Zhang 2005, pp. 865–867; Womack 2006, p. 200; O'Dowd 2007, p. 45. Xiaoming Zhang accepts the record of 25,000 PLA dead and 37,000 wounded, while O'Dowd follows Harlan W. Jencks's estimate in 1979 of 28,000 Chinese dead and Li Man Kin's estimate in 1981 of 35,000–45,000 Vietnamese casualties. Note however that the official journal of the PAVN estimated that China lost 62,000 soldiers in fighting, while the official record of the PLA acknowledged a loss of 20,000 soldiers.

estimated at 450,000, of whom more than 160,000 (a figure raised to some 240,000 according to Beijing's claim in July 1979) were forced from northern Vietnam across the Chinese border, gave the Chinese government cause to escalate economic sanctions against Vietnam in 1977–1978 and the punitive war against Vietnam in February 1979.[5]

This article is divided into three sections. The first discusses Sino-Vietnamese cultural-historical factors and the post-independence political discourses that shaped Sino-Vietnamese solidarity in the context of their common struggle against French colonialism and U.S. imperialism from 1950 to 1973. This section highlights Hanoi's growing resentment towards Beijing's domination and territorial boundary delineation between the two wartime allies, which intensified the emotional foundation of Vietnam's anti-China nationalism. The second section traces the evolution of the Sino-Vietnamese territorial dispute from its initial triggering to the escalation phase of the conflict (1974–1976). The third section examines the consequences of failed bilateral negotiations and the impact of escalated tensions between the two nations (from 1977 to early 1978), which laid the foundation for the Third Indochina War.

THE ILLUSION OF THE "BROTHERS PLUS COMRADES" DISCOURSE, 1950–1973

The history of Sino-Vietnamese interaction is a long one. The Vietnamese collective memory of Chinese domination over two millennia contained an important reservoir of narratives of heroism against Chinese hegemony, which Vietnamese nationalists drew upon to mobilize the people against future Chinese aggression.[6] While the main source of Vietnam's capability to repel repeated Chinese invasions, or to make Chinese occupation of Vietnam untenable, may have been a sense of heroic nationalism, at the same time there existed conscious emulation of Chinese political and military institutions, which not only proved instrumental in countering the Chinese threat, but also gratified Chinese emperors supremely confident of their own cultural superiority.[7] As William Duiker correctly observed, "As for the Vietnamese, their attitude toward China was a unique blend of respect, and truculence, combining a pragmatic acceptance of Chinese power and influence with a dogged defense of Vietnamese independence and distinctiveness."[8] The overwhelming emphasis of official Vietnamese history is on national resistance against foreign invaders, almost always China. This historical legacy remains a powerful force affecting contemporary Sino-Vietnamese relations.

The period 1950–1965 saw the closest cooperation between the two neighboring countries. During this period, leaders of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) and the

5 See Womack 2006, pp. 197–98; Womack quotes from Amer 1992. According to an internal report of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the General Secretary Le Duan and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, China claimed in July 1979 that the Vietnamese government expelled some 24,000 Chinese residents across the border; CPMO, Folder 11320, p. 1. All Vietnamese government documents cited in this article are from the Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng (Collection of the Prime Minister's Office, CPMO), held in Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia 3 (National Archive No. 3) in Hanoi.

6 See Taylor 1983; Duiker 1986; SarDesai 1992; Nguyen 1993; Kenny 2002.

7 See Truong 1967 and Inoguchi 1975.

8 Duiker 1986, p. 6.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) articulated a common discourse of "brothers plus comrades" Sino-Vietnamese intimacy.[9] Both sides negated the negativity of the past – that is, the history of Chinese aggression on and subjugation of Vietnam for two millennia before the French colonialism of the nineteenth century. Instead, they emphasized the People's Republic of China as a new revolutionary state of Chinese proletarian peasants and workers who had for centuries fought relentlessly against oppression from Chinese feudalism and European colonialism.[10] For instance, on 18 October 1956, *Nhan Dan*, the VWP Newspaper, published an editorial to welcome Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to the DRV by starting with this observation: "For a few thousand years, our two peoples fought against the feudal rulers [referring to both the Chinese and Vietnamese feudalists], and most recently, we fought against colonialism [by recalling the memory of the Chinese "Black Flag" popular movement that crossed the Sino-Vietnamese border to fight French troops alongside the Vietnamese people in Northern Vietnam.]"[11] Zhou Enlai then reciprocated by paying homage to the Hai Bà Trưng ("Two Sisters") who rose up against Chinese imperialism in AD 43 to denounce Chinese dynasties' chauvinism toward Vietnam in the past.[12] In reality, this "brothers plus comrades" discourse was shrouded in strategic calculations on both sides. As Qiang Zhai put it, "The Sino-DRV alliance was one of mutual needs. While Hanoi wanted China's aid in its struggle against the French and the U.S., Beijing also needed the DRV's support for its foreign policy goals."[13] For Hanoi, China's economic and military support for its war against the French return to Indochina was indispensable, while the Soviet Union was indifferent toward the Vietnamese cause.[14] Yet, Hanoi maintained a working relationship with Moscow and secretly expressed a desire for Soviet aid after the French departure in 1955.[15] For Beijing, North Vietnam, like North Korea, was a strategic buffer zone to defend China's southern flank against threats from unfriendly Western powers and served to validate the PRC's identity as a champion of national liberation struggles against colonialism and imperialism.[16]

During the early 1950s, the VWP was swept up by the brief illusion that the "brothers plus comrades" relationship between the two communist parties would usher Sino-Vietnamese relations into a new historical chapter of an equal alliance. However, although both the CCP and VWP saw the need to articulate a newly shared history of victimhood under the yoke of past Chinese dynasties and the common cause of resisting French colonialism, they fundamentally differed with regards to the nature of the newly forged alliance. In public, Chinese leaders repeatedly emphasized the rhetoric of "equality and mutual respect for independence" as a core principle of their new relationship. In practice,

9 See Westad 1998a, pp. 11–16.

10 Zhai 2000, p. 79.

11 See Nguyễn 1959.

12 Zhai 2000, p. 79.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

14 See Ang 2002.

15 Olsen 2006.

16 Zhai 2000, pp. 20–24.

however, their attitude towards the Vietnamese resembled one of a teacher–student relationship.[17] In the memory of Vietnamese leaders, the Chinese impulse to betray the Vietnamese revolution could be traced back to Beijing's advice during the 1954 Geneva Conference which culminated in the division of Vietnam until 1975.[18] Yet, such resentment did not develop into open hostility because the Vietnamese attached the highest priority to Chinese assistance to liberate South Vietnam. Indicative of this, in response to the Republic of South Vietnam (RSV)'s forced assimilation policy of Chinese residents in 1955, Hanoi verbally agreed to the principle of voluntary assimilation of Chinese residents; in 1957, North Vietnam and China signed a bilateral agreement in which Hanoi pledged not to resort to forced assimilation of Chinese residents the way the RSV had in South Vietnam.[19]

In early 1958, as Hanoi pursued a new phase of "armed struggle" to liberate South Vietnam, it needed increased Chinese economic and military aid. In this context, Beijing turned an unrelated crisis into an opportunity to exert its territorial interest in the South China Sea at a juncture when Hanoi was weak and heavily dependent on China's help. In late August 1958, Mao riskily decided to shell the island of Quemoy, provoking the second Taiwan Strait Crisis that escalated into a military showdown with the United States. On 4 September 1958, Beijing declared that the territory of the PRC "includes the Chinese mainland, its coastal islands, Taiwan, and its surrounding islands including the Penghu Islands, the Dongsha Islands, the Xisha (Paracel) Islands, the Zhongsha Islands, the Nansha (Spratly) Islands and all other coastal islands by the high seas."[20] On 14 September 1958, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong sent to Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai a letter which "recognizes and supports Beijing's September 4 declaration."[21] In reality, the leadership of the DRV had no legal right to cede any territory south of the Seventeenth Parallel to China because it was part of the RSV's territorial sovereignty. Later, on 10 June 1977, when challenged by Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian, Pham Van Dong rationalized Vietnam's earlier position by arguing that it was a "matter of war necessity" to support China's claims during the war because of the need to "place resistance to U.S. imperialism above everything else."[22] In rebuttal, Li Xiannian replied: "There was no war going on in Vietnam when on September 14, 1958 Premier Pham Van Dong ... acknowledged in his note to Premier Zhou Enlai that the Xisha and Nansha Islands are Chinese territory."[23]

In late 1964 to early 1965, faced with the prospect of a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam, Hanoi's leaders were deeply concerned about Beijing's hesitation to go to war with the U.S.

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17 Zhang 2006, pp. 264–66, 273–74.

18 Westad 1998a, pp. 11–16.

19 Han 2009, p. 10; also see Chang 1982b.

20 Zhai 2000, p. 209.

21 *Ibid.* For a more detailed account, see the minutes of the meeting between Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Vice-Premier Li Xiannian in Beijing on 10 June 1977, CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 5. Present at the meeting on the Vietnamese side were Dinh Duc Thien, Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Co Thach and Ambassador Nguyen Trong Vinh. On the Chinese side were the Minister of Foreign Affairs Huang Hua and Vice-Minister Han Nianlong. The author hand-copied this document from the National Archive No. 3, Hanoi, Vietnam.

22 CPMO, Folder 10460, pp. 4–5; also see Hyer 1995, p. 37; Lu'u 1995, p. 143.

23 CPMO, Folder 10460, pp. 4–5.

to defend their nation. Although Mao Zedong had formulated a militant approach towards the U.S. since the summer of 1962, and assured Hanoi's leaders of China's general commitment to defend North Vietnam in the event of a U.S. attack, Hanoi suspected that Mao was attempting to avoid direct military confrontation with the United States. Even after the Johnson administration made the decision in February and March 1965 to launch a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam (known as Operation Rolling Thunder), Mao consistently counseled caution.[24] On 9 May 1965, Hanoi undertook another initiative to declare that "the Paracel and Spratly Islands belong to China."[25] Pham Van Dong again raised the necessity and priority of resisting U.S. imperialism because the islands were at that time under the control of U.S. and South Vietnamese armed forces.[26] In hindsight, Hanoi's leaders were compelled to recognize Beijing's claim publicly because of the necessity of enlisting China's all-out support for the greater cause of armed struggle against U.S.-backed South Vietnam, and consequently could not articulate their own interests in opposition to China. In private, they greatly resented China's opportunistic territorial assertion at a time when Vietnam was heavily dependent on Chinese assistance.

Yet, it was the spillover effects of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution during its height in 1966–1968 on North Vietnam that consequently brought the mutual distrust poorly concealed during the fifteen-year period of close Sino-Vietnamese cooperation back to the surface, and caused the Vietnamese to fear Chinese chauvinism once again.[27] During the height of the Cultural Revolution, the discourse of "brothers plus comrades" Sino-Vietnamese solidarity was put to a real test for the first time, and more clearly revealed both sides' strategic interests poorly concealed behind a very thin veil of historical and ideological solidarity. As the historian Chen Jian best puts it, "What Beijing intended to create was a modern version of the relationship between the Central Kingdom and its subordinate neighbors. This practice effectively reminded the Vietnamese of their problematic past with the Chinese . . . ."[28] Chen Jian's observation resonates with the official view of the Vietnamese government at that time. Much later, on 10 June 1977, a year after the Cultural Revolution's end, Pham Van Dong told Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian and other senior Chinese officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that "for many years, especially during the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese comrades have been publicly very rude to us. They called us 'revisionists' because we accepted Soviet aid, and even called us 'ungrateful.' Using this kind of language, Chinese comrades harbored an unfriendly attitude towards us. Such attitudes exist in Hanoi, Beijing, and other places. Such attitudes have broken our hearts."[29]

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24 Chen 2001, pp. 215–216.

25 CPMO, Folder 10460, pp. 5–6.

26 *Ibid.* Lưu 1995, p. 143. Echoing Pham Van Dong's ambiguous explanation to Li Xiannian on 10 June 1977, Lưu Văn Lợi maintained that the DRV's declaration on 9 May 1965 was made in response to the United States' 24 April announcement of a war zone extending 100 nautical miles from the shore of Vietnam, thus placing the DRV's recognition of China's claims within the context of the widening war.

27 See Westad 2006, pp. 1–7. Also see Chen 2001, p. 237, and Zhai 2000, pp. 152–54.

28 Chen 2001, p. 237 and Zhai 2000, pp. 219–20.

29 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 20.

At the height of the Cultural Revolution, the Maoist radical faction took control of the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi. They rallied Chinese residents in northern Vietnam to support Mao's Cultural Revolution, promoted the Cultural Revolution ideology of "class struggle," instigated anti-Soviet revisionism campaigns, and even openly denounced Vietnamese leaders as "revisionists" for accepting Soviet assistance.[30] Chinese residents created disturbances by holding demonstrations against Soviet revisionism and openly conducting other pro-Maoist rallies in Hanoi. To the Vietnamese, these Chinese residents were "reactionary Chinese nationals."[31] As Han Xiaorong observed, "If the Chinese in North Vietnam were already on their way to becoming Vietnamese citizens before the Cultural Revolution, then the Cultural Revolution caused a reversal of this trend."[32] It proved to Vietnamese leaders that these Chinese residents remained loyal to their "motherland China" by blood.

In response to the spillover of the Cultural Revolution, Hanoi saw the need to invoke the familiar "the threat of aggression from the North" discourse to remind the Vietnamese public of Chinese chauvinism, even while they accepted Beijing's dispatch of some 320,000 Chinese "volunteers" to assist the North Vietnamese against the United States from 1966 to 1969.[33] This in turn profoundly irritated Beijing's leaders because "Vietnam's use of the past to imply the present" betrayed the spirit, and would undermine the emotional foundation, of the Sino-Vietnamese "brothers plus comrades" solidarity. Since 1950, Beijing had clearly and consistently condemned the historical aggression against Vietnam. In 1956 and again in 1970, Premier Zhou Enlai even paid homage to the Hai Bà Trưng (Two Sisters) Temple in Hanoi to pay respect to the two sisters who had risen up to resist feudal Chinese aggression against Vietnam.[34]

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In summary, a close examination of Sino-Vietnamese relations during the period of close cooperation from 1950 to 1965, and during the height of China's Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1968, reveals that Sino-Vietnamese solidarity was far from both sides' rosy portrayal of a "brothers plus comrades" relationship, yet it remained calm through all the turbulence because maintaining the image of Sino-Vietnamese cooperation served the strategic interests of both sides and preserved solidarity against common enemies. Hidden beneath the surface of the "brothers plus comrades" relationship was Hanoi's suppressed resentment at Beijing's willingness to change its politics without regard to Vietnamese interests and growing fear of resurgent Chinese chauvinism in the form of an outdated Chinese "tributary system" over Vietnam. Although Vietnamese leaders acknowledged the importance of Chinese assistance to North Vietnam, they resented the fact that Chinese leaders did not shy away from imposing their will on North Vietnam when the latter was weak and heavily dependent on China's assistance. As a tactical

30 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 17. Also see Quinn-Judge 2005, pp. 483–84.

31 Han 2009, pp. 12–13.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

33 See Path forthcoming; also see Chen 2001, p. 237, and Zhai 2000, p. 140.

34 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 20; Zhai 2000, p. 79.

response, Hanoi's leaders took initiatives to display tactical deference to China by declaring its recognition of Beijing's territorial claim over the Spratly and Paracel Islands, while they were not in a position to articulate their territorial interests in opposition to Beijing. Vietnam's repeated recognition of China's territorial claims in 1956, 1958, and 1965 was made with the ulterior motive of "compliance in face and betrayal in mind." In their thinking, enlisting a greater commitment of aid from China and deeper engagement in military confrontation with the U.S. during this fateful decade from 1956 to 1965 was accorded the highest priority. When the Vietnamese fear of losing the war declined and the Soviets were eager to replace the Chinese as the main provider of economic and military assistance in 1974, Hanoi actively challenged Chinese territorial expansion, bringing the Sino-Vietnamese territorial dispute back to the surface. The land border between China and Vietnam became an issue of dispute because of shifts in position of border demarcations that had been made since 1955, and both sides accused each other of changing the status quo. The land border dispute turned into border clashes from 1974 onwards.[35]

HANOI'S RESPONSES TO CHINESE TERRITORIAL EXPANSION, 1974–1976

As Hanoi's military victory came into sight and the time-horizon of national unification was shortened, Beijing and Hanoi hastened to grasp whatever they could from the disputed land and maritime territory as potential leverage to turn the anticipated negotiations in their respective favor. Beijing's opportunistic use of military force to capture a number of major Paracel islands from the retreating RSV forces in January 1974 consequently sparked Hanoi's fear of further Chinese territorial expansion at the expense of a weaker Vietnam after the war, bringing the long-suppressed territorial boundary dispute between the two nations back to the surface. In Beijing's view, China's unilateral takeover of the Paracel islands in January 1974 from South Vietnamese control was legitimate because Hanoi had repeatedly recognized China's claims in 1956, 1958, and 1965, most importantly through Pham Van Dong's note of the DRV's acceptance of China's sovereignty claims on 14 September 1958.[36] In reality, the primary motives of both Beijing and Hanoi were security and economic interests. The scholarly consensus is that by 1973 Chinese leaders were increasingly concerned about Hanoi's tilt toward Moscow and the consequent Soviet use of the islands as a military base to threaten China, and that the territorial disputes became acute because of the prospects for offshore oil around the islands.[37] Similarly, Hanoi's change of mind about its past recognition of China's claims was largely motivated by the economic and security interest of gaining exclusive control of resources in the area and defending Vietnam's long S-shaped coast against invasion.[38] In November 1973, Hanoi proposed talks on delineation of the boundary in the Gulf of Tonkin, on the grounds that the boundary of the two countries in the Gulf had never been clarified because Vietnam had

35 See Chang 1986, pp. 25–35; Duiker 1986, pp. 72–73.

36 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 20; also see Zhai 2000, pp. 209–10, and Womack 2006, p. 182.

37 See Womack 2006, p. 181; Garver 1992, pp. 1001–02.

38 See Tønnesson 2000, p. 200.

been constantly at war. That aroused Chinese leaders' concern that Hanoi had changed its mind about its war-time recognition of Chinese claims in the South China Sea.[39]

As it turned out, Hanoi's later responses confirmed Beijing's suspicions. Immediately after Beijing's January 1974 military campaign, Hanoi expressed a mild protest against the Chinese occupation of the Paracel islands by reminding Beijing that "the countries involved should settle such disputes through negotiation and in a spirit of equality, mutual respect, and good-neighborliness."[40] Nonetheless, as China consolidated its control over the Paracel islands, Hanoi moved quickly to preempt Chinese seizure of the Spratly islands. On 11 April 1975, three weeks before the capture of Saigon, the North Vietnamese navy attacked and occupied six of the islands previously held by South Vietnamese forces and immediately asserted its territorial claim over the Spratly Islands.[41] Throughout the second half of 1975, Hanoi and Beijing were engaged in a divisive exchange of anti-irredentist claims on the islands and the spinning of media campaigns to rally nationalistic fervor at home.[42] This tit-for-tat territorial contest between Hanoi and Beijing put the two war-time "brothers plus comrades" on a collision course, which in turn caused Chinese leaders to view Vietnamese leaders as "ungrateful and treacherous."

Simultaneously, the land border dispute emerged into hotly contested territory and a slowly but steadily militarized zone between the two nations between 1974 and 1976. Starting in 1974, armed clashes occurred along the Sino-Vietnamese land border. Both sides accused one another of provoking the border skirmishes.[43] On 18 March 1975, Beijing proposed that the two countries negotiate to settle the land border issue, but Hanoi preferred to delay such negotiations until after its liberation of South Vietnam, and allowed local authorities to resolve the disputes. Beijing later charged that "Hanoi intentionally delayed to allow local Vietnamese authorities to change the land boundary status quo."[44] Apparently, Beijing's motive, as Qiang Zhai pointed out, was to reach a settlement before the end of the war, while North Vietnam was still at a disadvantage.[45] In the ensuing years, each side accused the other of betraying the 1955 principles of maintaining the territorial status quo. Mirroring the Chinese perspective of Vietnam's lack of good faith in resolving the territorial dispute, the head of the Vietnamese border negotiation delegation Phan Hien noted that over the course of the six months from October 1977 to March 1978, the Chinese had dragged their feet on border negotiations when the Vietnamese side did not make the concessions they wanted, and raised new issues outside the negotiation agenda, including "the issue of the Paracel and Spratly islands, the Vietnamese harassment of the Chinese along the border, and the flight of Chinese residents to China."[46] On the ground, the escalating territorial dispute along the boundary between

39 Garver 1992, p. 1003; also see Zhai 2000, p. 208.

40 Chanda, 1986, p. 21; also see Zhai 2000, p. 182.

41 Garver 1992, p. 1005.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 1006.

43 Zhai 2000, p. 210.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 CPMO, Folder 10776 (1), pp. 1–2.

the two nations turned the people on both sides of the border from brotherly comrades into bitter adversaries, and a once peaceful and open border into an increasingly militarized and closed border in a short span of just a few years. According to a Chinese record published by the *People's Daily* on 27 February 1979, the number of Sino-Vietnamese border provocations rapidly increased from 121 in 1974 to 1,108 in 1978 with a slight dip – dropping from 986 in 1976 to 752 in 1977, as Hanoi and Beijing tried to patch up their relations.[47]

Hanoi's Closer Military Cooperation with Moscow

After 1975, Hanoi's leaders faced a dilemma in formulating a congruent and coherent China policy despite the fact that Moscow proved more enthusiastic about replacing Beijing as the main provider of aid to Vietnam by the end of that year. On the one hand, China's remaining aid was substantial and its economic potential and geographical proximity were viewed by Hanoi's leaders as vital to Vietnam's post-war economic reconstruction. On the other hand, China's increased incursions into Vietnam's "territorial sovereignty" were definitively securitized as an imminent threat to the newly unified Vietnam in 1975–1976. In July 1976, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) reported:

> Only with China, we are facing so many problems. China has been cold to us in political relations and limited their economic assistance ... At the border between the two countries, China has strengthened their encroachment on our territory; the number of encroachments, points of encroachment, and the number of Chinese people mobilized to reside in the disputed territory along the border have rapidly increased since mid-1975, concentrating at the border provinces ... Chinese fishing boats have encroached far deeper into our maritime territory in the South surrounding Hoàng Sa (the Paracel Islands), and far deeper into Trư'ờng Sa (the Spratly Islands). We have made concerted efforts to maintain friendship between the two countries; we have also taken initiatives to propose bilateral dialogue and pushed for bilateral economic relations, hoping not to allow relations to chill, but we are determined to defend our territorial integrity.[48]

In late 1975, the DRV Ministry of Defense proposed closer military relations with the Soviet Union. On 30 December 1975, at the urgent request of the Ministry of Defense, Premier Pham Van Dong agreed to send a military delegation to bring "classified documents" from the Defense Ministry to Moscow and maintain total secrecy as they traveled through China. Attached to the "classified document" was a list of military supplies. Notably, Hanoi requested Moscow (1) to prioritize the delivery of anti-aircraft missiles (SA-75M) and battleships; (2) to supply modern radar and equipment to strengthen Vietnam's capability to defend its skies and seas; (3) to begin urgently the construction

47 Tretiak 1979, p. 741.

48 CPMO, Folder 9833, pp. 1–2.

of defense projects the Soviets had pledged for Vietnam.[49] Hanoi also requested that Moscow continue to deliver military assistance according to the agreements signed on 27 March 1965 and 14 June 1972, and maintain the level of military assistance during the war period.[50]

On 16 January 1976, according to a record of the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense, Moscow sent a large collection of documents about their latest military science and pledged to provide long-term military training to Vietnamese military personnel.[51] On 10 February, Vietnam purchased five Soviet planes on credit, two TU134A, two YAK40, and one AN30, for aerial surveillance and cartography or mapmaking.[52] On 24 March, Moscow accepted forty-five Vietnamese pilots for advanced military training in the Soviet Union. On 10 March, the Ministry of Defense proposed: "In order to meet the need to build up our military in the new situation, the Institute of Military Science needs to transform and expand its military research and experimentation from the Soviet Union, France, Bulgaria, and East Germany."[53] In response to the perceived military threat from China, Hanoi in 1976 increasingly sought to emulate military science from countries other than China and acquire more sophisticated Soviet weaponry. From 1976 onward, Soviet-Vietnamese military cooperation steadily increased while Sino-Vietnamese military cooperation rapidly declined.[54] On 27 July 1976, the Defense Ministry reported to the Prime Minister that "Vietnam's proposal for Soviet military supplies for 1976–1977 has been approved by Moscow. This will guarantee sufficient weapons and technical equipment for war fighting, military exercises, and rehabilitation of our military apparatus after the war."[55]

While these Vietnamese military preparations proceeded under the Chinese radar, border negotiations remained Hanoi's preferred option to solve the territorial dispute with China by the end of 1976, for two reasons. First, viewing the status quo as undesirable because it favored Beijing's claim, Hanoi desired to delay the negotiations to buy time so that it could gather enough evidence to alter the equation in its favor at the bargaining table. Second, it would also buy time to strengthen its military capability to deal with the worst-case scenario – a possible Chinese military invasion. While the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance ultimately failed to prevent the Chinese invasion of northern Vietnam in 1979 (following Vietnam's earlier invasion of the Democratic Republic of Kampuchea), Hanoi's ability to change the land border status quo and increased propensity toward confronting Chinese expansion with military force along the border during this

49 CPMO, Folder 10090 (1), pp. 6–9. Note that none of the battleships was ever delivered.

50 *Ibid.* This report is not dated, but was apparently made at the end of 1975 as the DRV prepared its request for economic and military assistance from both China and the Soviet Union.

51 Vice-Minister of Defense Tran Sam's letter (Number 551/QP) to the Prime Minister's Office on 26 December 1975 titled "Send Officials to Work in the Soviet Union," was attached to the Ministry of Defense's report, CPMO, Folder 10090 (1).

52 Vice-Minister of Defense Tran Sam to the Prime Minister's Office on 10 February 1976, a letter (Number 76/QP) titled "Purchasing planes from the Soviet Union," VNA No. 3, CPMO, Folder 10090, pp. 1–5. These were the latest models of Soviet reconnaissance and aerial surveillance planes commissioned for operation by the Soviet Air Force in the early 1970s.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

55 CPMO, Folder 10090 (2), pp. 10–12.

period reflected Hanoi's growing military confidence as a result of closer military cooperation with Moscow.

Anti-China Discourses

Historically, in times of potential threat from its northern neighbor China, Vietnamese nationalists have invoked the Vietnamese collective memory of heroic resistance to past Chinese aggression against Vietnam in their appeals to the Vietnamese population to defend their "fatherland." Invoking such collective memory requires minimal effort, because the heroic spirits of past Vietnamese leaders who rebelled against Chinese domination or who defended Vietnamese independence against Chinese attacks are reified in history textbooks, museums, temples, and shrines all over Vietnam.[56] Notably, Keith Taylor and Oliver Wolters, among Vietnam historians, have provided a strong record of past Vietnamese elites' instrumental use of heroic spirits to sanction popular loyalty and obedience to rulers and provide psychological comfort or boost morale to protect the country from external threats.[57] Far from detaching themselves from past heroes, Vietnamese communist leaders viewed themselves in the tradition of "proper rule[,]" in which heroic and selfless rallying of the people against foreign invaders to defend the Vietnamese nation was the essence of a heroic leadership style.[58] We now know that Vietnamese leaders extensively used historical memory of past Chinese chauvinism to remind the Vietnamese people of the need to limit Chinese political and cultural influence when Beijing dispatched some 320,000 Chinese "volunteers" to assist North Vietnam against U.S. imperialism during the height of China's Cultural Revolution from 1965 to 1968.

It was Hanoi's aversion to Beijing's apologetic gestures that infuriated the Chinese leadership. On 29 September 1975, Deng Xiaoping, who was then reinstated by Mao and Zhou as Vice-Premier, warned Le Duan of the consequences of using the past to imply the present:

> There have been some problems in relations between our countries. Some of them emerged when President Ho was still alive. We have to say that we are not at ease when we get to read Vietnamese newspapers and know [Vietnamese] public opinion. In fact, you stress the threat from the North. The threat from the North for us is the existence of Soviet troops at our northern borders, but for you, it means China.[59]

Again, on 10 June 1977, Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian gave what appeared to be the last warning to Hanoi about the use of historical issues. Li complained to Pham Van Dong that:

> For many years, the Vietnamese side has continuously allowed the Vietnamese media outlets (newspapers, magazines, films, drama) and other forms to spread

56 See Giebel 2004, pp. 174–75. Also see Wolters 1995, pp. 63–74 and Taylor 1983, p. 352.

57 See Giebel's summary in Giebel 2004, p. 175. Giebel cites Taylor 1986 and Wolters, "Preface," in Wolters 1988, pp. vii–xi.

58 Giebel 2004, pp. 179–80.

59 Deng Xiaoping and Le Duan, 24 September 1975, Westad 1998b, p. 192.

> a great deal of anti-Chinese propaganda about the "Fight against aggression from the North." The Vietnamese brought up the past to imply the present to arouse Vietnamese people's hatred toward China, creating all kinds of negative effects. Those who want to preserve Sino-Vietnamese fraternal relations do not feel at ease. Foreign foes will be happy and will use this to divide us. The Soviet state press, TASS, has used the Vietnamese comrades' propaganda to incite Vietnam's opposition to China.[60]

Li also reminded Pham that "The Chinese today are not responsible for the Chinese feudalists' and imperialists' actions toward Vietnam in the past. Vietnamese leaders' use of historical issues against China is not fraternal and a clear violation of the fundamental spirit of the Sino-Vietnamese solidarity forged by the two communist parties since the beginning."[61] Li also protested to Pham that:

> Across the entire Vietnamese society, there has been widespread slander such as attacking Chairman Mao by saying that Mao has divided the international Socialist solidarity, divided the Chinese Communist Party, and radically pulled the Chinese revolution backward. Some have even denounced Mao Zedong Thought as "a peasant's ideology." Some Vietnamese Comrades said that Mao's thought, a far-sighted document, talked nonsense about the Chinese class struggle, and that Mao's embarking on land reform in Hunan was blind and misguided; it is nothing but a peasant's ideology.[62]

Despite Hanoi's denial of its anti-Chinese campaign to Beijing's leaders, significant evidence suggests that Hanoi's articulation of the anti-Chinese campaign intensified after 1974, producing adverse consequences on Sino-Vietnamese relations and people-to-people relations at the local levels in Vietnam and along the Sino-Vietnamese border. From 1974 onward, the "threat from the North" discourse became an important propaganda tool for Hanoi's leaders in rallying the Vietnamese population to defend their territorial sovereignty against Chinese incursions. As it turned out, such anti-Chinese propaganda produced unintended consequences that greatly damaged Sino-Vietnamese fraternal solidarity. Between 1974 and August 1976, anti-Chinese propaganda resulted in thirty-seven cases of local Vietnamese physically assaulting Chinese experts working in Vietnam. In a report to the Prime Minister's Office, the Vietnamese Department of Foreign Experts spoke of a number of cases where local Vietnamese people threw stones at Chinese experts and their residences, and also of the existence of anti-China paintings in a number of places where Chinese experts worked.[63] Beijing raised thirteen cases of such incidents in 1974, seventeen cases in 1975 and seven cases in the first quarter of

60 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 20.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 11. Note that Pham Van Dong did not refute Li Xiannian's claims of anti-Maoism in Vietnamese society.

63 CMPO, Folder 9832, pp. 16–55. This report was discussed in the meeting at the Prime Minister's Office on the morning of 21 August 1976.

1976. On 20 August 1976, the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi sent an official protest to the Vietnamese Department of Foreign Experts and warned that such an unfriendly attitude toward Chinese experts was unacceptable.[64] On 15 May 1976, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong instructed Deputy Prime Minister Do Muoi to solve this issue urgently and prevent it from disrupting China-aided construction projects.[65] The Department of Foreign Experts' summary report submitted to Do Muoi in August 1976 revealed that, out of fear of real and perceived Vietnamese harassment and mistreatment, many Chinese experts refused to work and stay in their assigned locality, and others simply refused to obey their Vietnamese superiors' instructions.[66] In August 1976, in reaction to Beijing's angry protest and widespread disruption to construction projects, Pham Van Dong instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior to issue clear guidance regarding the relationship between local Vietnamese cadres and foreign experts to prevent such mistakes (the mistreatment of Chinese experts) from escalating; he also instructed the Central Party Propaganda Committee to educate cadres, civil servants, and the people to show respect toward foreign experts.[67] Notably, however, in the same report, Chinese experts were singled out as the worst troublemakers, while Soviet experts were criticized only mildly.[68]

The number of cases of Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese experts in 1976 is modest, but it was not an insignificant phenomenon because it demonstrated that anti-China discourse had grown out of control, especially given the fact that Vietnamese leaders needed Chinese experts to recover and carry through many China-aided projects. In August 1976, Beijing threatened to pull out all its experts and further stopped all new projects, which prompted Hanoi's leaders immediately to instruct Hoang Tung, chief of Central Party Propaganda, "to educate local Vietnamese authorities and people to be civilized and behave properly and politely to foreign experts."[69] But, as it turned out, the Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese experts and anti-Chinese propaganda continued unabated. At the local level, Chinese experts' daily protest ranged from "frequent absences from work" to "return to China before schedule." In early 1978, as the Sino-Vietnamese tensions escalated, the Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese experts became one of the main reasons for Beijing to pull out all remaining Chinese experts and refuse to accept Vietnamese trainees.[70] Hence, the increasing Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese experts and the border skirmishes between 1974 and 1978 were closely related and were the consequences of Hanoi's anti-China rhetoric and policy practices.

Moreover, in late December 1976, pro-Chinese figures were purged from the VCP Central Committee Politburo during the long-delayed Fourth Party Congress. Those included most notably the dropping of Hoang Van Hoan – a former Vietnamese

64 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

65 CPMO, Folder 10100, pp. 1–15.

66 CMPO, Folder 9832, p. 45.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*, 42.

69 CPMO, Folder 9832, p. 28.

70 CPMO, Folder 10778 (1), pp. 61–63.

ambassador to China and a founding member of the Indochinese Communist Party – from the Politburo and Central Committee. Those dropped from the Central Committee included Ngo Minh Loan, Ngo Thuyen, Nguyen Trong Vinh, and Ly Ban (all were alternate members of the Central Committee). These individuals also had all served in China, three as DRV ambassadors, and Ly Ban, Vice-Minister of Foreign Trade, had been the key economic negotiator in establishing close ties with Beijing.[71] Stephen Morris observes that "the demise of these figures could only have been interpreted in Beijing as a further and now overt repudiation of Chinese influence . . . the sacking of these prominent former ambassadors to China would have been interpreted as a further affirmation of Hanoi's desire to deepen its already close relations with Moscow."[72] The dropping of the pro-Chinese faction, I would further argue, would certainly have been interpreted by Beijing's leaders as part of Hanoi's anti-Chinese campaign.

Forced Assimilation of Chinese Residents in Vietnam after 1976

In 1976, the unified Vietnam initiated a new policy of forced assimilation of Chinese residents as Sino-Vietnamese relations were rapidly deteriorating. This policy was driven by two considerations. First, it provided a quick and tough solution to the Chinese problem, and pleased the Soviet Union. This policy was clearly motivated by the Vietnamese suspicion of Chinese residents' loyalty to China as indicated during the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1966–1968 when the two mass organizations of Chinese residents in Vietnam, namely the Hanoi Hoa Lien Association and the General Association of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam, staged demonstrations to support Maoist thought and Mao's call to oppose Soviet revisionism.[73] By the late 1960s, the Vietnamese authorities were keeping a closer watch on the Chinese embassy links with the overseas Chinese communities in northern Vietnam.[74] The Soviet embassy in Hanoi also regarded Chinese residents as the most important conduit for Chinese influence in Vietnam. Thus, substituting a single Vietnamese citizenship in place of the dual citizenship embraced by many ethnic Chinese not only allowed the government more control over them, but also pleased the Soviets.[75] Second, by the same token, the "forced assimilation" policy also provided a rationale for "nationalizing" businesses owned by capitalists (many but not all of whom were Chinese) in Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City (Cho Lon), as well as other, smaller urban areas. Beijing charged that as early as 1976, the Vietnamese government began its policy of expelling Chinese residents from Vietnam, which violated the principle of "sustained and voluntary" assimilation signed between the two governments in 1955. Beijing's charge is not baseless. Throughout 1976, according to Soviet Embassy records, Vietnamese authorities began closing a number of Chinese schools and prohibiting teaching subjects in the schools in the Chinese language, resettling ethnic Chinese among the ethnic

71 Morris 2006, pp. 421–22.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 422.

73 Han 2009, p. 22; Ungar 1987–88, pp. 603–04.

74 Ungar 1987–88, p. 604.

75 On the Soviet Embassy's position, see Morris 1999, pp. 175–76.

Vietnamese population in the South, evicting ethnic Chinese who lived along the Sino-Vietnamese border to populate the New Economic Zones, and restricting their contact with the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi and their relatives on the Chinese side of the border.[76] Thus, as Morris pointed out, "from 1976, the Vietnamese communist leaders regarded the entire ethnic Chinese community as potentially disloyal and subversive."[77]

In June 1977, Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian on behalf of the CPP called Hanoi's measures in the South after 1975 as "coercive," thus violating the 1955 principle of voluntary naturalization of citizenship. In response, Premier Pham Van Dong offered the rationale that "the majority of Chinese residents in the South had been naturalized by the Republic of South Vietnam before 1975; as a result, few Chinese nationals were left in the South."[78] With regard to Chinese residents in the North, Pham Van Dong pointed out that "since 1975, in North Vietnam, we have followed the [1955] agreement and the Chinese living in Vietnam are pleased with the Vietnamese government's policy." Pham added:

> Taking this opportunity, we wanted to raise with Comrade Li the issue of five or six thousand overseas Vietnamese residents in China. We have been informed that there has been widespread discrimination against most of the ethnic Vietnamese residents in China. They cannot join unions, organize normal associations, or attend university in China. Comrade should reexamine this issue.[79]

It should be noted that in spite of the rising number of border skirmishes between 1975 and 1976, Beijing's leaders were not yet alarmed about the plight of the Chinese residents in northern Vietnam. However, the refugee flow into China grew rapidly in late 1977, and by spring 1978, the number exceeded 160,000. As a result of the systematic, extremely harsh anti-Chinese campaign throughout the country, 95 per cent of the refugees crossing the Sino-Vietnamese border in 1978 were Chinese residents from the long socialized northern part of Vietnam.[80]

To what extent did anti-Chinese rhetoric in official discourse help "unite" a bitterly divided country against an external enemy and thus distract or downplay growing domestic tensions related to the state's efforts to "build socialism" in not only the former Democratic Republic of Vietnam, but the former Republic of South Vietnam as well? Although evidence remains far from conclusive, I contend that Hanoi's apparent need and desire to label China as a threat was largely informed by the need to "reunify" an internally divided population in the midst of a debilitating economic crisis after 1976. The process of "National Reunification" and "Socialist Transformation" from 1976 onward

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76 *Ibid.* pp. 175–76.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

78 CPMO, Folder 10776 (1), pp. 5–8.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

80 See Han 2009, pp. 1–30; Chang 1982b, pp. 212–13; Morris 1999, pp. 170–72 (Chapter 7, "The Collapse of Vietnamese–Chinese Relations"); Duiker 1986, pp. 39–40.

was a difficult and contentious affair as efforts to eradicate capitalism, especially in Cho Lon, and to collectivize production in the South met with little success and a U.S.-led embargo.[81] Beijing's November 1975 decision to reduce economic and military aid to Vietnam for the period 1976–1980 to an insignificant level further undercut Vietnam's first five-year economic plan after unification and left them few other options other than expanding ties with the Soviet Union to reduce their dependency on China.[82] At its Fourth National Congress in December 1976, the VWP was formally renamed the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and its leadership embarked on an ambitious five-year plan for 1976 to 1980 to build a socialist economy and bring the South onto the path of socialism. The result was a widespread socio-economic crisis which erupted before the invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 and the Chinese attacks on Vietnam in February 1979, a crisis which Secretary General Le Duan later admitted in his political report to the Fifth Party Congress in 1982.

In an insightful analysis, Vo Nhan Tri attributed the most important causes of such a crisis to endogenous factors, that is, the extension of the Stalinist economic development strategy from North to South after the unification in 1976 with top priority given to heavy industry at the expense of agriculture and light industry. A host of interrelated causes included the state's forced and accelerated collectivization, strong prejudice against household and individual economy, willful disregard of material incentives for peasants and workers, and brutal "Socialist transformation" of private industry and trade.[83] After 1976, popular discontent with the state's ambitious expansion of collectivization in the North after the war and peasants' defiance of the state's extension of collectivization in the South placed Vietnamese peasants and national leaders on a collision course whose gravity intensified with the decline in agricultural production after 1975.[84] Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' internal report in July 1977 admitted that "for the past six months, we have faced many difficulties due to unfavorable weather, an extremely cold winter and drought. We have serious difficulty with food supplies. Our ministry and concerned authorities have made great efforts to solve the food shortages early in this year."[85] By mid-1977, the food crisis became a national security issue because it threatened to cause domestic chaos throughout Vietnam. Adam Fforde and Stefan de Vylder put it best:

> After decades of war and struggle, Vietnam set off along a path that was to encompass neo-Stalinism and economic failure ... Widespread hunger and poverty therefore continued. During the decade after 1975, Vietnam thus

81 On endogenous and exogenous causes of the failure of Vietnam's Socialist transformation after 1976 and the socio-economic crisis that followed in the ensuing few years, see Vo 1990, pp. 58–109.

82 See Path 2011, pp. 22–26.

83 Vo 1990, p. 108.

84 See Fforde 1989 and Kerkvliet 1995. By the late 1970s, as Kerkvliet points out (p. 411), villagers and local party officials resisted the state's large-scale collectivization, putting pressure on national leaders, undermining Hanoi's major policy and national economic programs in the midst of economic crisis and possible massive political alienation.

85 CPMO, Folder 10160, pp. 1–2. Food crisis and the border issues with Cambodia and China were originally underlined (that is, stressed] in the document.

> endured a second tragedy to follow the sorrows of war. For this, the political leadership, as in any country, must bear much of the blame, and in this regard reference will inevitably be made to the wartime party leader, Le Duan, who remained in power until he died in 1986.[86]

In the midst of the failure of Socialist transformation and the resultant economic crisis and severe food shortages in 1976–1977, Hanoi intensified the campaign to eradicate capitalist compradors in the South. It apparently targeted as many as 760 households of wealthy Chinese residents in the Cho Lon area.[87] The pressures of economic crisis/poverty and national insecurity in both countries, as Alexander Woodside observed in 1979, played an important role in causing the Sino-Vietnamese relations to deteriorate.[88] In Vietnam, nationalism emerged in part from a passionate concern over Vietnam's intractable poverty and in part from the desire to form a strong sense of homogenous Vietnamese national identity.[89] Yet, due to the lack of direct evidence, the extent to which Hanoi utilized anti-China nationalism to divert domestic pressures remains an important empirical question. Next, I want to turn back to the issue of Sino-Vietnamese territorial negotiations and discuss how both intended and unintended consequences of Vietnam's anti-Chinese irredentist policy not only derailed the negotiation efforts, but also escalated the border conflict.

FAILED BORDER NEGOTIATIONS, OCTOBER 1977 TO MARCH 1978

Lying at the core of the Sino-Vietnamese land border conflict after 1975 was Hanoi's refusal to accept the land boundary status quo on the basis of the Franco-Qing Treaties of 1887, which put Vietnam in a disadvantageous position. Worse, Beijing refused to negotiate with Hanoi on the issue of the Paracel and Spratly islands because Hanoi had ruled out the validity of its previous recognition of the PRC's claim over the islands, particularly Pham Van Dong's letter to Premier Zhou Enlai on 14 September 1958. Hence, there was no mutually agreed framework between the two governments. On 29 September 1975, in his meeting with Le Duan, Deng Xiaoping proposed a bilateral negotiation to solve the land border dispute once and for all, but Hanoi wanted to negotiate both land and water boundaries all at once.[90] However, Beijing firmly disagreed with Hanoi's proposal and maintained that the bilateral talks would have to delay until Hanoi accepted Beijing's condition of negotiating the land border first. Beijing insisted that any land border negotiation would have to begin with the principle of the Franco-Qing Treaties of 1887, which the VWP and CCP agreed to in 1955, and that the status quo over the disputed

86 See the preface to Fforde and de Vylder 1996.

87 Ngo 2006, pp. 133–38; also see Morris 1999, pp. 178–79.

88 Woodside 1979, p. 381.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 392.

90 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 20.

territory would have to be observed in order to maintain friendship and economic relations along the Sino-Vietnamese border.[91] From 1975 to mid-1977, each side accused the other side of being unconstructive and unwilling to solve the issue through diplomatic means. After a long delay, Vietnam agreed to negotiate the land border with China in October 1977. As it turned out, however, both sides had allowed their local authorities to take opportunistic measures to gain every inch of the disputed territory from the other side, which produced a cycle of tit-for-tat land grabbing during the second half of 1977. On the Vietnamese side of the border, the measures resulted in the Vietnamese local authorities' increased mistreatment of Chinese residents and rapid flow of Chinese refugees into adjacent provinces, mainly Yunnan and Guangxi in southern China. By mid-1978, nearly 200,000 ethnic Chinese refugees from North Vietnam had crossed the border into China.

Beijing leveled a consistent accusation that the Vietnamese side intended to use the language of negotiations to buy time to allow the local authorities and border defense forces to grab as much land as they possibly could in the disputed territory, as well as to collect as many cases of the Chinese side's violations as possible before coming to the negotiating table. Each side then launched accusations that the other side was violating the principle of maintaining the status quo, when in reality both sides were violating it. In his conversation with Pham Van Dong on 10 June 1977, Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian charged that:

> Before 1974, the two sides always upheld this principle of [maintaining the status quo and solving the dispute through negotiation]. Along the Sino-Vietnamese border, border defense forces and cadres of the two countries also got along with each other, lived peacefully side by side, and helped each other during the war. However, in the past several years, the Sino-Vietnamese border has been under stress … The Vietnamese comrades have delayed the commencement of [bilateral] negotiations and continued to allow the lower levels (local People's Committees at the borders) to intrude illegally into our territory, and then claimed possession over our land. They hindered the normal work of our border defense forces, causing trouble and the destruction of our people's normal livelihood at the border, and violently assaulted our people in a concerted attempt to unilaterally and forcefully change the status quo at the border. Because of that, border skirmishes have increased in the past few years; the situation there has become increasingly more serious – there have even been cases where the Vietnamese border defense forces opened fire on our people at the borders with Yunnan and Guangxi.[92]

Urging Hanoi to stop involving local authorities in the border disputes, Li Xiannian reminded Pham Van Dong that "Comrade Deng Xiaoping told Comrade Le Duan [in September 1975] that the two sides should not listen to and follow the reports from

91 *Ibid.*

92 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

local authorities at the border and that the top leaderships of the two Parties and Governments should decide this matter."[93] Pham admitted to Li that the Vietnamese government actually depended on "competent local authorities" to defend Vietnam's territorial integrity. However, he also pointed out:

> Based on our side's reports, the majority of the border skirmishes [that Li Xiannian raised] were provoked by Chinese local authorities at the border ... I'd like to be frank with you that our country is small. From Hanoi to the [Sino-Vietnamese] border is just a few hundred kilometers, and therefore it is very easy for us to go there and grasp the border situation.[94]

Mirroring Beijing's view, Vietnamese leaders suspected that Chinese leaders were treacherously staging a diplomatic ploy, pretending eagerness to negotiate the border dispute to conceal a creeping expansionist policy.[95] The head of the Vietnamese border negotiation team and Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Phan Hien was of the view that Beijing's real motive was to buy time for Chinese local authorities and border armed forces to grab more Vietnamese land illegally.[96] Pham also charged that "there has been a wide spread campaign on the Chinese side of the border to spread rumors that Vietnam has sided with the Soviets to attack China."[97] Li admitted that there had also been a number of incidents provoked by Chinese local authorities, but that these were not China's policy, and promised that Beijing would take stricter measures to educate Chinese local authorities at the border areas to ensure that they would truly maintain the spirit of Sino-Vietnamese fraternal relations, and would not trespass into the Vietnamese side of the border.[98]

In actuality, Hanoi and Beijing continued to allow their local authorities to play an important role in preparing documentation of their territorial possessions allegedly seized by the other side. The result was that both sides' local authorities frivolously claimed as much land as they could and listed as many cases of one another's incursions as they could possibly find before the negotiations even began, thus undermining any chance to ease tension and find solutions through negotiation. In the midst of this tit-for-tat land grabbing, the Vietnamese local authorities did more than their government asked for in the name of defending their territorial sovereignty by intimidating and frightening Chinese residents along the border areas, which sparked the first wave of ethnic Chinese fleeing across the border into China in the second half of 1977.

After several months of preparation, the Sino-Vietnamese border negotiations commenced in October 1977. However, they not only yielded no positive result, but also turned into a forum for divisive mutual accusations and protests. The negotiation in late 1977 took place in the context of rapidly deteriorating Sino-Vietnamese relations.

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93 *Ibid.*

94 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

95 CPMO, Folder 10776 (1), pp. 3–4.

96 *Ibid.*

97 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 9.

98 *Ibid.*

Beijing reduced its economic and military aid to Hanoi and curtailed bilateral economic relations to a minimal level, while substantially increasing its economic and military aid to the anti-Vietnamese Democratic Kampuchea (DK). As a result, Vietnam feared being encircled by China and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. MOFA's July report stated that "in the past six months [of 1977], our diplomacy had to address very important issues with our allies as well as with our adversaries. Those are the issues related to our security, sovereignty, territorial integrity, international position and influence and the implementation of our five year economic plan [1976–1980]."[99] With regards to DK–Vietnam relations, Hanoi also was facing increased military attacks by the Khmer Rouge along the border, while all attempts at negotiation failed in the second half of 1977.[100] This intensified Hanoi's fear that Vietnam was being subjected to coordinated pressure from the north (China) and the southwest (the Khmer Rouge).

In Hanoi's view, the escalated territorial conflict with China and its ally the Khmer Rouge in 1977 posed a threat to the existence of the newly unified Vietnamese state. In addressing the Khmer Rouge issue, Hanoi appeared to believe that improved relations with Beijing would help reduce its tension with the DK because the Khmer Rouge's provocative actions had China's strong backing. The preparation for the October 1977 border negotiation with China received special attention at the top leadership of the Vietnamese government, directly involving the VCP Central Committee Politburo, important ministries and departments including Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, the State Map Department, down to People's Committees in communes along the Sino-Vietnamese border. Apparently, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior, the two powerful Vietnamese defense and security enforcement apparatus, played prominent roles in both the preparation for and participation in the negotiation with China, although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as head of the Vietnamese delegation. Thus, the military and police forces dominated and executed the preparation plan. In effect, this put the armed forces of both countries on high alert along both the land and water frontiers between the two countries.

On 5 July 1977, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed that the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Navy participate in the preparations for the upcoming border negotiations with China.[101] On 7 July, the Prime Minister's Office called for an urgent meeting to study and disseminate the Politburo's policy instructions regarding such preparation tasks, and discuss measures to be taken to implement the policy effectively.[102] The consensus was to entrust Vietnamese local authorities with the task of collecting evidence of China's encroachment cases, and any historical, physical, and documentary evidence of Vietnamese ownership of land illegally seized by the Chinese in the past. In addition, they were instructed to conduct constant surveillance on any suspicious Chinese activities on the other side of the border and directly report such incidents to the

99 CPMO, Folder 10160, pp. 1–2.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

101 CMPO, Folder 10464 (1), pp. 25–26.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 27. The Vice-Minister of the Prime Minister's Office Hoang Du sent an urgent letter titled "Meeting on the border issue," dated 7 July 1977, to concerned ministries of the Vietnamese government.

central government in Hanoi. On 7 July, the Prime Minister's Office passed down the following specific orders to the local Vietnamese authorities:

> 1. Compile files concerning all new incidents [of Chinese encroachment] and any change in the boundary of the disputed territory, which has been concluded during the previous round of bilateral border marking.
> 2. Collect all existing contracts and physical evidence and so forth as proof of our possession of the territory encroached upon by the Chinese.
> 3. Take pictures of any territory encroached upon by the Chinese and any border markers removed by the Chinese side.
> 4. Vigilantly and closely maintain surveillance over the situation in border areas, including the Chinese side's activities, and report them to the central government in timely fashion. From now until the date of the negotiations, you must strictly follow the instruction of the Party Central Committee to decisively defend our territorial integrity but avoid causing the kind of problems that the Chinese can use to blame us.[103]

On 25 July, MOFA proposed that the Vietnamese border negotiation delegation should consist of two high-ranking military officials who were experts on the land and maritime boundaries with China, and heads of the map and geological department. They were given responsibility to prepare documentary evidence. Nguyen Tien, head of the China Department at MOFA, was in charge of programming the upcoming border negotiations with China. Noticeably, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior were instructed to put together and review all documents on border issues from 1956 to 1977. The Defense Ministry was ordered to conduct surveillance flights along the border and produce photographic images in order to construct a border map and produce a complete report before September 1977.[104]

Shortly after that, the Prime Minister's Office instructed the People's Committees in all provinces along the Sino-Vietnamese border to inform local authorities of the Central Party's directive – that is, from July to the negotiation date in October, the People's Party Committees had to effectively carry out the crucial tasks of "educating local people, cadres, and armed forces, firmly defending their territory, and making all efforts to prevent [China's] acts of encroaching on our land or other violations by the Chinese side, but they shall avoid provoking incidents which China could use to lay blame on us."[105] The Defense Ministry and Interior Ministry were required to give clear instructions to all members of the armed forces under their authority to follow the Party Central Committee's directive accordingly.[106] As a result, these local authorities were under increased pressure to produce urgent reports on Chinese incursion, having now become Hanoi's eyes and ears.

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103 CPMO, Folder 10464 (2), pp. 32–33.

104 *Ibid.*

105 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

106 *Ibid.*

Underlying Vietnam's tit-for-tat struggle with the Chinese along the border was Hanoi's belief, as Phan Hien summarized in his report on 31 March 1978, that "China has no willingness to solve the border issue, but intends to use it to spread propaganda to arouse popular support inside and outside its country."[107] In the third round of negotiations from 12 to 24 January 1978, China raised a nine-point proposal (five from the second round of negotiations on 11 October 1978, and adding four new conditions concerning the issue of "maintaining the status quo" and other details about the 1887 Franco-Qing treaties).[108] The nine-point proposal, as Phan Hien noted in his report to his leadership, primarily served China's interests in two ways: first, China attempted to use the historical border boundary to its advantage – although the Chinese spoke of using the 1887 Franco-Qing Treaty as the basis, in reality they drew a different boundary map to expand their claim over not only the territory occupied by Chinese people due to historical legacies but also Vietnam's territory that China had sent their people to occupy for many years. Second, China put forth the condition of "maintaining the status quo" to retain the territory they had recently taken from Vietnam, demanding that the latter share the river for fishing, give away part of the territory around the Sino-Vietnamese Friendship Pass, and so forth.[109] Though Hanoi agreed to negotiate the land border issue first, Beijing, to the former's disappointment, refused to make any concession regarding the Paracel and Spratly islands, insisting that the two countries observe the principles agreed upon in the two parties' declarative exchanges in 1957–1958. Phan Hien described the Chinese side's attitude throughout the negotiation process this way:

> At the beginning, they spoke of friendship and arranged some welcoming activities for our delegation, though with low-key protocol. But later they began to behave rudely toward us, then used the language of threat and have recently adopted a confrontational and cold attitude [toward us], especially after the Vietnamese-Cambodian border conflict broke out [late 1977].[110]

Phan Hien's report also requested that concerned authorities including the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior take counter-measures regarding the issues of "maintaining the status quo before a bilateral agreement on the border boundary comes into effect" and "Chinese residents fleeing across the border to China."[111]

As it turned out later, these counter-irredentist measures resulted in many cases of alleged discrimination and mistreatment of ethnic Chinese residents along the border, and sparked numerous border clashes. Neither Vietnamese nor Chinese leaders were willing to restrain their local authorities. In Vietnam, it was even more difficult and dangerous for any local Vietnamese leader to do so because they would be accused of being pro-Chinese or traitors. As a result, border clashes between local armed forces along the

107 CPMO, Folder 10776 (1), p. 5.

108 CPMO, Folder 10776 (2), pp. 11–25.

109 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

110 CMPO, Folder 10464 (1), pp. 25–26.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Sino-Vietnamese borders occurred more frequently and spiraled out of control. Beijing then criticized Hanoi for using local authorities for land grabbing, and vice versa. This profoundly intensified an atmosphere of insecurity and paranoia on both sides of the border, which in turn caused the flight of Chinese residents from northern Vietnam to China during 1977 and 1978.

It was the escalated border conflict and the Vietnamese government's growing concern about Chinese residents' loyalty toward the Chinese government that drove Hanoi to accelerate swiftly the policy of forced assimilation of Chinese residents to "purify" the Vietnamese nation in 1977–1978. As Chinese residents resisted Hanoi's forced assimilation policy, Hanoi's suspicion of Chinese loyalty was confirmed and tough measures were then introduced: Chinese residents along the border were either forced to migrate to China or relocate to New Economic Zones against their will.[112] In the midst of this chaotic atmosphere, local Vietnamese authorities' harassment of ethnic Chinese residents along the border and their alleged expulsions continued unabated, precipitating and deepening the perception of fear and paranoia within the Chinese community across northern Vietnam. As it turned out, the mass exodus of Chinese residents along the border began in 1977. On 12 May 1978, in the Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry's letter to the Vietnamese Embassy, Beijing protested that:

> Since early 1977, along the border provinces in the North, the Vietnamese side has begun to expel Chinese immigrants in the provinces along the [Sino-Vietnamese] border, who migrated from China to live in Vietnam for many years. In November 1977, the Vietnamese side has begun to expel overseas Chinese residing in three Vietnamese border provinces, Hoang Lien Son, Lai Chau, and Son La. Especially, since early 1978, the Vietnamese side has intensified its expulsion of Chinese overseas and enlarged the scale to Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa etc. The number of Chinese residents that fled to China soared up rapidly – in a little over one month [April 1978], the number reached 30,000. This month alone, over 40,000 Chinese residents in northern Vietnam were expelled across the border, and it will continue to increase.[113]

Hence, it is no coincidence that the mass exodus of Chinese residents from northern Vietnam coincided with the heightened territorial dispute between China and Vietnam. Hanoi's forced assimilation of Chinese residents that began in 1976 and the political discourse of "the threat from the North" were the ingredients of the Vietnamese state-sponsored nationalism to mold national unity and cohesion and mobilize domestic resources to confront the emerging threat from China. In hindsight, the fact that Chinese residents in northern Vietnam, especially in provinces along the] Sino-Vietnamese border, were easy targets of local Vietnamese authorities' "scare campaign" to frighten them into fleeing from Vietnam into China is not difficult to comprehend.

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112 For more details, see Han 2009, pp. 22–23.

113 CPMO, Folder 10778(2), pp. 71–73. In PRC Foreign Affairs Ministry's letter dated 12 May 1978 sent to the Vietnamese Embassy in Beijing, China declared the cancellation of twenty-one China-aided projects.

As discussed above, their loyalty, in Hanoi's view, lay with the Chinese state despite the fact that they resided in Vietnamese territory.

The result was a spiraling conflict with disastrous consequences. The number of border disputes rose from 100 cases in 1974 to over 400 in 1975 and to over 900 cases in 1976.[114] From July 1977 to March 1978, border clashes rose from a total of 1,625 reported by both sides to 2,175 reported by Vietnam and 1,108 reported by China in 1978.[115] Thus, the Sino-Vietnamese border was rapidly militarized. The fact that the number of border clashes in 1977 doubled from the previous year, and only slightly declined in 1978, clearly indicates how intensified the militarization of the border became in the short span of a few years. In this climate, Hanoi moved ethnic Chinese from border areas – other ethnic minorities including the Hmong, Dzao, Thay, and Nung were also affected – to create a militarized buffer zone. As a result, the mass exodus of Chinese residents from northern Vietnam into China also grew rapidly from late 1977 to mid-1978. Before the Sino-Vietnamese border war, 95 per cent of Chinese residents in northern Vietnam had already crossed the border into China. By early June of 1978, the number of refugees in China had reached 100,000. By mid-July, the total number exceeded 160,000. The earliest refugees were from provinces adjacent to China, but later, Chinese residents from other parts of northern Vietnam joined the flow. In mid-July 1978, China closed its border with Vietnam to stop the further influx of refugees, but small groups of people continued to enter. By February 1979, when China launched the three-week war against Vietnam, 202,000 refugees had already arrived in China.[116] There is no dispute that Hanoi's forced assimilation caused the flight of Chinese residents, but it is not the only cause. The intensified Sino-Vietnamese border dispute exacerbated by the radicalization of both sides' domestic measures to lay claims over disputed territory along the border and the militarization of the border itself instilled a pervasive fear of persecution and harassment within the Chinese community in northern Vietnam, and gave free rein to local Vietnamese authorities to harass and persecute Chinese residents there. The parallel trend between the increased militarization of the border and the increased mass exodus of Chinese residents in northern Vietnam indicates the linkage between the two issues.

CONCLUSION

The newly available Vietnamese internal government documents combined with the existing scholarship on this subject clearly reveal that the onset of the Sino-Vietnamese territorial dispute can be traced back to Pham Van Dong's 14 September 1958 letter, which recognized the PRC's claims over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, and the DRV's 9 May 1965 recognition of the those islands. Although Hanoi's leaders had at that time no legal right to cede any territory to China south of the Seventeenth Parallel, they tactically displayed deference to the latter to secure its deeper engagement in Vietnam's wider war against the U.S. and South Vietnam. Hanoi's heavy reliance on China's economic and military aid between 1955 and 1973 compelled the Vietnamese leaders to silence any protest

114 CPMO, Folder 10460, p. 14.

115 See Womack 2006, p, 199. Womack quoted Dauphin 1989.

116 See Han 2009, pp. 1–5.

against China's claims because they were simply in no position to articulate their territorial interests in opposition to China's assertive claims. Hanoi's past recognition of Beijing's territorial claims, especially over the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea, provided Beijing's leaders with reasons to militarily and unilaterally capture a number of major islands in the Paracels in January 1974. As Hanoi's leaders gained greater confidence in their military victory and unification was lay within their grasp, Vietnam faced no external threat other than from irredentist China. After 1974, with Soviet backing, Hanoi's leaders saw the need to challenge Chinese territorial expansion. From Beijing's perspective, Vietnamese leaders were ungrateful to China for its enormous sacrifice of energy and resources, expended in order to help Vietnam during the wars, and they treacherously betrayed the Chinese leadership by refusing to honor their acknowledgment of China's "legitimate" claim over the two islands. However, from Hanoi's perspective, it was China's military takeover of the Paracel islands in January 1974 which betrayed the principle of maintaining the status quo and revealed the true color of Chinese territorial expansionism.

By 1976, Vietnam's escalating territorial dispute with China along its northern boundary and with Democratic Kampuchea along its southern flank instilled a heightened perception of a threat to the existence of the Vietnamese nation in the mind of Hanoi's leaders. The rapid rise in the number of armed clashes between Vietnamese and Chinese border defense forces compelled the Vietnamese government to grant heightened priority and political salience to the territorial dispute with China. This gave the Vietnamese government a legitimate reason to break free from the existing rules and principles that had governed Sino-Vietnamese relations, particularly the 1955 CCP–VWP agreements pertaining to the outstanding territorial dispute between the two countries and the 1957 party-to-party agreement that defined the status of Chinese residents in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government devised three important internal and external balancing strategies: (1) articulate anti-China nationalism to rally the Vietnamese people to support its anti-Chinese policies and repel future Chinese aggression; (2) seek closer military cooperation with the Soviet Union and increase reliance on the more sophisticated Soviet weapons as an integral part of its military preparedness; and (3) negotiate with China to buy sufficient time to collect evidence of Chinese territorial incursions along the land and maritime boundaries, with the hope of turning a negotiated agreement in its favor while increasing its military preparedness to face a possible Chinese invasion.

First, the Vietnamese government articulated the "threat from Northern aggression" discourse, a historically familiar theme of Vietnam's nationalist resistance against Chinese invasion, to rally the Vietnamese population in defense of their homeland. Second, beginning in early 1976, Hanoi decisively sought much closer military cooperation with Moscow, a position Hanoi had previously been reluctant to take for fear that it would undermine its relations with Beijing. In particular, Hanoi hastened to strengthen its border defense surveillance and naval capability by relying to a much greater extent on sophisticated Soviet weapons, battleships and advanced surveillance planes. Third, when the governments of both sides signaled to their respective local authorities along the border to defend their territory and prevent incursions from the other side, an iron curtain descended upon the Sino-Vietnamese border, turning the two peoples on either side of the border from wartime brotherly comrades into post-war adversaries. This led to rapid

militarization of the border and escalated to armed border conflict within a span of just a few years. What made the land border dispute so complicated to solve was that Hanoi refused to accept the status quo situation that placed Beijing in such an advantageous position at the negotiating table – that is, if they accepted the 1887 Franco-Qing Treaties as the basis for border negotiations, the Vietnamese would lose significant territory to the Chinese. While both Hanoi and Beijing publically championed border negotiations to show their good will and intention to seek a peaceful resolution of the dispute after 1975, they tactically conceived negotiations as a ploy to buy as much time to change the territorial status quo and lay claim over as large a proportion of the disputed territory along the border as they possibly could, hoping to shape the outcome of a negotiated agreement in their favor. What actually happened was that while both sides agreed to negotiate a solution to the territorial dispute, they simultaneously allowed their local authorities to seize land without restraint. In the process, in response to reports of Chinese territorial incursions, Vietnamese local authorities were instructed to document Chinese incursions, collect every piece of historical evidence of Vietnamese territorial possessions, and record any proof of China's removal of the border posts, and so forth. Such activities by Vietnam caused the Chinese side to reciprocate in a tit-for-tat land grabbing contest, leading to the rapid rise of armed clashes on the border and the closure of the border itself by mid-1978.

The consequences of both sides' threat-reactive "tit-for-tat" responses to the territorial dispute had a far-reaching contagious effect on the course of Sino-Vietnamese relations. It was no coincidence that the rising number of border clashes coincided with the rapid rise of Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese experts and residents in northern Vietnam between 1976 and 1978. It is in the context of the intensified Sino-Vietnamese territorial dispute that Hanoi questioned Chinese residents' loyalty and began a policy of forced assimilation that led to the mass exodus of Chinese residents in 1977. Underlying the increased mistreatment of Chinese experts and residents in northern Vietnam was Hanoi's conscious articulation of anti-China public discourse and the forced assimilation of Chinese residents, both measures intended to produce a coherent Vietnamese nationalism and extract total popular loyalty to the Vietnamese state in order to confront the perceived threat from China. At the communal level, the simple perceptual delineation of the Chinese as "treacherous, aggressive, expansionistic" from that of the Vietnamese as "honest, peaceful and victimized by the Chinese expansionism" caused local Vietnamese authorities and people to view not just the Chinese government but all Chinese, including Chinese residents and experts in northern Vietnam, in a negative light.

State-sponsored anti-China discourse permitted local Vietnamese authorities to act and behave as if the Chinese, a different ethnic community, were hostile to them. As a result, the number of the Vietnamese verbal and physical assaults on Chinese residents and experts in northern Vietnam continued unrestrained from 1976 to 1978. On top of that, the militarization of the Sino-Vietnamese border contributed to a climate of fear and insecurity within the Chinese community, allowing all kinds of divisive rumors to penetrate the community and providing local authorities with even more freedom and legitimate reasons to persecute, frighten, or harass Chinese residents at will. In turn, the Vietnamese mistreatment of Chinese residents and experts justified Beijing's retaliatory measures by curtailing aid to Vietnam and reducing bilateral economic relations to [a] minimal level. Beijing's hastened economic sanctions only accelerated Hanoi's tilt toward

Moscow, shortening the time-horizon of a formal Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. The South China Sea has once again emerged as a major irritant in Sino-Vietnamese relations today, and anti-China nationalism remains a useful tool for Hanoi in countering Chinese irredentism there.

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"CPMO" stands for: Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng ("Collection of the Prime Minister's Office"), held in Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia 3 ("National Archive No. 3"), Hanoi.

CMPO, Folder 9832

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CPMO, Folder 10160

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Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng ("The Prime Minister's Office"), "Biên bản về cuộc họp giữ Thủ Tướng Phạm Văn Đồng và Phó Thủ Tướng Lý Tiên Niệm, tại Bắc Kinh, ngày 10 tháng 6 năm 1977" ("Minutes of the Meeting between Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Vice-Premier Li Xiannian in Beijing on 10 June 1977"). CMPO, Folder 10460, pp. 1–20.

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